Mr. President,

It is a privilege for Germany to introduce the draft resolution “Saving the Cultural Heritage of Iraq”, which we drafted together with our Iraqi partners.

I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Eliassos for his vivid description of the situation.

All of us have been profoundly shocked by the barbaric attacks on Iraq’s cultural heritage perpetrated by the terrorist organization ISIL, or Da’esh. We all remember our feelings of anger and impotence at the videos showing militants destroying the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hatra, ravaging Mosul’s museum or the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, using sledgehammers and caterpillars to put an abrupt and violent end to thousands of years of history.

Their objective is clear: By obliterating the visible traces of history and civilization, these terrorists want to destroy the foundations of a peaceful civil society and a unified country. They want to erase the soul, the identity of the people of Iraq. What they don’t destroy, they loot and sell abroad in order to finance their terrorism from the spoils.
The attacks on the cultural heritage of Iraq are a test case for all of us. Iraq is a cradle of our common civilization; we cannot leave it to face this challenge alone. Its heritage has been entrusted to the care of all of mankind. The international community must do all it can to put an end to these war crimes.

And this is what these attacks are and what they should be called, with all the consequences this entails: war crimes. War crimes that need to be prosecuted.

We are alarmed that these egregious crimes may be only part of a worrying trend to use intentional attacks on irretrievable cultural heritage as a tactic of war – from Hatra to Bamiyan or Timbuktu the cultural heritage of thousands of years has been attacked and destroyed. And we are watching with concern the current escalation in the vicinity of the world heritage site of Palmyra.

Together with our Iraqi partners, Germany is therefore introducing this draft resolution to save the cultural heritage of Iraq – as we did when the Taliban were destroying the Buddha statues of Bamiyan. With your support, the resolution we table today will deliver a resounding and united message.

This resolution condemns these barbaric acts of destruction and looting of the cultural heritage of Iraq and expresses outrage that attacks on
cultural heritage are used as a tactic of war. It calls for an immediate halt to the wanton destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage, affirms that such attacks may amount to war crimes and calls upon all states to hold the perpetrators of such attacks accountable.

The resolution affirms its support for the Iraqi Government in protecting the heritage of Iraq. It calls upon all States to assist Iraq in fighting against trafficking in cultural property and in repairing, restoring and conserving damaged or destroyed cultural heritage.

The resolution urges all states to counter the trafficking of cultural property, through better national and international regulations. Specifically, it urges measures to ensure that all traders in cultural property are required to provide verifiable documentation of provenance and export certificates.

The resolution also calls on States to enhance the protection, preservation documentation of cultural heritage endangered by armed conflicts. It calls upon community leaders to stand up and reaffirm unambiguously that there is no justification for the destruction of humanity's cultural heritage.

In conclusion, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to you, Mr. President, to the Secretariat, to UNESCO, especially Director-General Bokova, who is present here today, to all of the over 90 co-sponsors, and
all the delegations that participated in the informal consultations, and in particular to Ambassador Alhakim and his team for their dedication and close cooperation. Let us stand together against such barbarism. And let us speak out with a single voice for the preservation of the culture and diversity which we have inherited from the past – because without them we have no future.